The proxy & sectarian war of Houthis and Iran in Yemen

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The involvement of Shiism or Shia religious actors in Yemen's conflicts is often framed within geopolitical and sectarian narratives, particularly due to the influence of Iran and the regional rivalry with Sunni-majority states like Saudi Arabia. However, it's important to distinguish between the actions of Iran as a state and the broader Shia religious identity.

Key Points on Shia Influence in Yemen's Conflicts:

1. **Houthi Movement (Ansar Allah)**

- The Houthis, a Zaidi Shia-led rebel group, have been the primary Shia-affiliated force in Yemen's war. Zaidism is a branch of Shia Islam distinct from the Twelver Shiaism dominant in Iran, though there are theological and political overlaps.

- The Houthis have received varying degrees of support from Iran, including weapons, training, and political backing, which has led to accusations that they are an Iranian proxy. However, their motivations are primarily rooted in Yemeni domestic grievances (e.g., marginalization, corruption, and opposition to Saudi-backed governments).

2. **Iran's Role vs. Shia Religious Influence**

- Iran's support for the Houthis is often seen as part of its broader "axis of resistance" strategy (which includes Hezbollah, Iraqi Shia militias, and Syria), leveraging Shia solidarity to expand regional influence.

- However, the Houthis are not purely a Shia religious project; their struggle is also nationalist and anti-interventionist (against Saudi Arabia and the UAE).

3. **Sectarian Dimensions**

- The Yemen war has been framed by some as a Sunni (Saudi-led coalition) vs. Shia (Houthi) conflict, but Yemen's divisions are more complex, involving tribal, political, and economic factors.

- Groups (like Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula or AQAP and the Islamic State) have also fought the Houthis, framing their war in sectarian terms.

4. **Shia Fanaticism or Ideological Warfare?**

- The Houthi slogan *"Death to America, Death to 'Israel', Curse on the Jews"* mirrors Iranian revolutionary rhetoric, suggesting ideological alignment.

- However, Zaidi traditions are historically more moderate than Iran's Twelver revolutionary ideology. The Houthis have pragmatically adopted some Iranian themes to secure support.

5. **Non-State Shia Networks**

- Lebanese Hezbollah has reportedly advised the Houthis, showing transnational Shia militant collaboration.

- Iraqi Shia militias (with Iranian ties) have also been accused of aiding the Houthis, though evidence is often murky.

Conclusion:

While Shia religious ideology (particularly Iran's revolutionary Shiaism) plays a role in shaping the Houthi movement, the Yemen conflict is not purely a "Shia fanatic war." It is better understood as a proxy war where Iran exploits Shia ties to challenge rivals, while the Houthis use Iranian support to advance their own agenda. The sectarian aspect is amplified by regional powers but does not fully define the conflict.

Part 2

 # **PART 2: The Houthis' Pro-Palestine Battles – Sectarian Smokescreen or Genuine Solidarity?**

Introduction

The Houthi movement's recent escalation in support of Palestine—through missile attacks on 'Israel' and Red Sea shipping disruptions—has drawn global attention. While some view this as legitimate resistance against 'Israel'i occupation, others argue it is a cynical ploy to mask the Houthis' deep-rooted Shiite sectarian hostility toward Sunnis and Arabs, as well as their 'oppressive rule' in Yemen. This section examines whether the Houthis' pro-Palestine stance is genuine or a strategic distraction, while also analyzing the recent Israeli strike on Yemen's last functional airport in retaliation.

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1. The Houthis' Pro-Palestine Campaign: Key Actions

Since the October 2023 Gaza war, the Houthis have:

- **Fired ballistic missiles and drones at 'Israel'**, though most were intercepted.

- **Attacked commercial ships** in the Red Sea, claiming to target vessels linked to 'Israel'.

- **Declared an open war** on 'Israel' and the U.S., framing themselves as part of Iran's "Axis of Resistance."

These actions have won them praise from some anti-Israel factions but have also exacerbated Yemen's suffering, particularly after 'Israel''s retaliatory strike on **Hodeidah Airport** (Yemen's last major functioning airport) in June 2024, further crippling humanitarian aid.

2. Is This Solidarity or a Sectarian Smokescreen?

****A. Historical Houthi Hostility Toward Sunnis & Arabs****

The Houthi movement has a well-documented history of anti-Sunni and anti-Arab rhetoric:

- **"Curse on the Jews" Slogan:** While anti-Israel, their chants also include Shiite sectarian curses against Sunni figures like Abu Bakr and Umar, not only revered by Sunnis or the most respected among the companions of the Prophet Muhammad PUBH and two out of four of his righteous Khalifas (*Khulafaa Raashida*), may Allah be pleased with them all, but rejected by hardline Shiites categorically, a stand that has been well documented in their books, orations and even folk traditions, making them arch rivals of not only Arabs but greatly controversial in the whole Muslim world about their Islam itself.

- **Persecution of Sunnis in Yemen:** Reports from Human Rights Watch and UN panels detail Houthi repression of Sunni scholars, Salafis, and even moderate Zaidis, something that is very much expected from a Shiite militant group who draw their ideology from Shiism which permits them to fight the Sunnis ideologically and with a mask.

- **Iranian Influence:** The Houthis' ideological alignment with Iran's Khomeinist doctrine—which views Sunni Arab regimes as enemies—fuels skepticism about their true motives.

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B. Exploiting Palestinian Suffering for Legitimacy

- **Diverting Attention from Yemen's Crisis:** The Houthis rule over famine-stricken regions while spending resources on missiles against 'Israel'.

- **Gaining Iranian & Regional Backing:** By positioning themselves as anti-Israel, they secure more Iranian support.

- **Undermining Sunni Leadership:** Their attacks embarrass Saudi Arabia and the UAE, which normalized ties with 'Israel' but failed to effectively protect Palestine though have been funding the repeated rebuilding Gaza drives as well as sheltering thousands of Palestinians on their soil.

C. The Consequences: More Suffering for Yemenis

- **Israeli Retaliation on Hodeidah Airport (June 2024):** The destruction of Yemen's last major airport worsened an already dire humanitarian crisis, limiting aid deliveries, leaving millions more to die out of hunger and lack of medical care and basic amenities, something most similar to Gaza now.

- **Red Sea Blockades Hurt Yemen:** Shipping disruptions have spiked food and fuel prices in Yemen, where 80% rely on imports.

- **Strengthening Houthi Grip:** The war narrative helps them suppress dissent by labeling critics as "traitors" to the Palestinian cause.

3. Conclusion: Calculated Shiite Sectarian Politics Over Genuine Solidarity

The Houthis' pro-Palestine stance is not purely altruistic but a strategic move to:

1. **Mask their Shiite sectarian agenda** against Sunnis and Arab states.

2. **Consolidate power** in Yemen by diverting attention from their failures.

3. **Serve Iran's interests** by pressuring 'Israel' and Sunni rivals.

While their attacks on 'Israel' resonate with some, their actions have worsened Yemen's agony—proving that their "resistance" is more about ideological warfare than true liberation for Palestinians.

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